



A BRIEF HISTORY OF VETERANS SERVICES IN SOUTH DAKOTA

SDDVA
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During World War II, recognizing the need for veterans' assistance in the state, Governor M. Q. Sharpe called a special session of the State Legislature on July 10, 1944, to establish the South Dakota State Veterans Department and the Veterans Commission. Prior to this time, there existed what was described as a 'mere gesture' towards veterans' assistance. This gesture was in the form of a single contact officer whose total reimbursement was \$2,500 per year for salary and all expenses. The position of Contact Officer is believed to have existed from about 1923 until the establishment of the Department in 1944.

The legislation establishing the Veterans Department and the Commission included authority for counties to employ County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO). The law, however, did not include any requirements as to salary, term of office, or standards of performance. Many of the original CVSO's were individuals who had served voluntarily as Post Service Officers for various veterans organizations and, while they were dedicated in their efforts, meager salaries provided little incentive toward improvement. Through the years new legislation implemented the following changes: authorization for the Veterans Department to pay CVSOs' expenses when attending training sessions; requirement that each county must employ, or join with another county in employing, a CVSO; supplemental salary assistance from the state for counties who maintain certain salary and service standards, and authorization for the tribes to hire their own Tribal Veterans Service Officer (TVSO). Legislation enacted in 1973 renamed the former Veterans Department to the Division of Veterans Affairs and placed it within the Department of Military & Veterans Affairs.

The South Dakota Division of Veterans Affairs (SDDVA) is an **ADVOCATE** for the veteran and his/her family members. By mutual agreements SDDVA services claims of individuals who have authorized the American Legion, American Ex-Prisoners of War, AMVETS, Blinded Veterans of America, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Non-Commissioned Officers Association, SDDVA, The Retired Enlisted Association, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Veterans of World War I to represent them. It is a division of state government that exists to assist anyone in applying for and receiving the veteran's benefits they are entitled to.

SDDVA has a total of 19 staff located in three offices. The Pierre office, located in the Soldiers & Sailors Building consists of the Division Director, the Field Supervisor, three Field Officers, two Veterans Education staff, the Veterans Bonus Claims Examiner and one support staff position. The Sioux Falls Claims Office, located in the VA Regional Office consists of the Claims

Office Supervisor, six Service Officers, a Veterans Claims Examiner and one support staff position. The West River Field Officer has an office located in the Ft. Meade VAMC.

Since the original legislation in 1944 our states' network of County & Tribal Veterans Service Officers and SDDVA personnel have assisted thousands of our veterans and their family members with receiving the benefits that were earned through service to our country, and our job is nowhere near done. World events over the last several years have led to a whole new generation of veterans who will need our assistance for years to come. These young men and women were raised in a much faster paced and technologically advanced environment than their fathers and grandfathers from previous wars and their needs and expectations are much different from those who served before them. Providing the professional level of service they will expect, well into the 21st century, is a challenge that our entire network must accept and be prepared for.